GH

THE NATURE OF MENTAL ACTIVITY.

A SYMPOSIUM

BY

MESSRS. S. ALEXANDER, M.A., LL.D., JAMES WARD, CARVETH READ, AND G. F. STOUT, M.A., LL.D.

[*Reprinted from the "Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society,"* 1908.]

LONDON:
HARRISON AND SONS, ST. MARTIN'S LANE, W.C.,
PRINTERS IN ORDINARY TO HIS MAJESTY.

1908.

3406.

THE
CHARLES MYERS
LIBRARY

Reference Section

NATIONAL INSTITUTE
OF
INDUSTRIAL
PSYCHOLOGY

WELLCOME
LIBRARY
General Collections
P 3108

22502857824

G H S

[*Reprinted from the "Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society,"* 1908.]

IX.—THE NATURE OF MENTAL ACTIVITY.

A Symposium by S. Alexander, James Ward, Carveth Read, and G. F. Stout.

1.—*By* S. Alexander.

There are two questions which may be intended when we are asked what is the consciousness of activity. We may mean what is it to be conscious of activity as distinguished from passivity. Or we may mean simply and generally what is the consciousness of performing any mental process whatever, supposing we have such a consciousness of activity. The second interpretation of the question is not, perhaps, the more natural or usual one. We speak rather of mental *process* in this sense than of mental activity. On the other hand, we commonly do speak of acts of hearing, perceiving, inference, and it is not strained to speak of a sensory action or an act of sensation. Activity in this sense is mental function in general. Both the narrower and the wider question are psychological. But the distinction of activity and passivity is in a great degree one of detail. The question of the consciousness of mental activity in general is more fundamental, though it is difficult or even impossible to keep this question altogether separate from metaphysics or theory of knowledge. But it is the more interesting to me, and I shall devote the larger part of my remarks to it. In part of what I say I do not know how far I am or am not merely painfully trying to realise for myself what my teachers have said already. Two of them follow me in this discussion. But I prefer not to divert the discussion from the subject itself by any direct examination of their published statements.

Let me begin with the narrower question, which prepares the way for the other. You may seek to explain activity, in its distinction from passivity, in two different ways, both of which I have entertained in turns and have come to regard as erroneous. You may describe it in terms of the muscular movements and strains, and other bodily actions in which mental activity like that of active attention, or inference, or desire, finds expression. In my own case, mental activity, especially in thinking, is accompanied by marked movements of the eyes, which are apt to change their position with each change of the thought, and whose movements, in fact, I use as a means of directing thought in different directions and controlling it. Now, these and the like movements appear to me highly significant, because when you try to describe mental activity in words you inevitably, as I shall point out later, tend to be aware also of its connection with certain portions of the organism. But they are not mental activity itself, but only physical movements belonging to a specially privileged external thing. This is one error I have learned to avoid. The second is this. You may describe activity in terms of your ideas—you may say that it is the consciousness of the expansion of an idea against a limit and the like. Here again I acknowledge the significance of the analysis. But it must be understood that ideas in this account of the matter must be regarded as themselves "psychical events" or processes. In other words, the expansion in question is not a mere development of the contents of my mind. If this were so, you could not distinguish the consciousness of your own activity from that of an external physical activity, say, of a shot tearing a lion's shoulder. I used at one time, naively perhaps, to consider that whenever you had ideas ABC replaced continuously by ABCD that that was also the only experience of activity that you could have. But I see now that this is impossible, and that the activity lies not in the changing presentations, but in the process of transition itself from ABC

to ABCD. I should not, indeed, myself speak of a psychical event ABC developing into another ABCD, because that seems to imply that you do have psychical events which psychically are different in quality according to the character of their content, as if the perception of a tree were different in quality from that of a rose, and I shall give reasons hereafter for repudiating any such notion altogether. But quite apart from the propriety of speaking of psychical events as described in terms of their contents, what I have said is enough to show that the consciousness of activity must be found in some change of direction of the mental process itself. As mental process always has reference to certain objects (or, if you like to call them so, presentations) you may study the mental process indirectly by studying the object, and so may delude yourself into the belief that the mental process is itself a presentation, something you can reflect on as if it were distinguished from yourself.

Various attempts have been made to describe in detail the precise character of the difference between active and passive mental process. Activity has been called the self-realisation of an idea, as an idea—or it has been said that you have activity when one mental process is the outcome of previous mental process. The first statement applies very clearly to cases like desire or the effort of recollection. It does not apply so clearly to a simple case like that of the sight of bright sunshine which drives me out to enjoy it; there is an "idea" present here of something to bask in, but though I am conscious of bodily activity I feel myself mentally passive rather than mentally active. The second description applies directly to the active working out of an interest, and it makes clear the reason for the passivity of such experiences as an interesting sensation or a sudden flash of inspiration, but it does not apply equally well to the passivity of reverie, where process is the outcome of previous process, and yet no activity is felt. Perhaps I shall do best to describe shortly what, as helped by these analyses, I think

I discover in my own feeling of activity—*e.g.*, in desire, or trying to remember, or in inference. My mind begins to move in certain directions, *e.g.*, towards the forgotten name, but is not able to reach its end. It needs for success to be reinforced by connected processes in the mind, in virtue of which the resistance is overcome. The initial indeterminateness of movement is followed by a victorious and definite movement. There appears thus to be present in my consciousness of activity not merely an incipient or nascent movement (and an "idea" as such appears to me on its mental side nothing but such a nascent movement), which becomes fulfilled, but a complexity of other tendencies. When an incipient movement of itself passes into definite action, I do not feel activity. But the more I call in the help of reinforcing tendencies, the more I do feel active. Hence the feeling of activity, which tends to go with the working out of an interest, which has not become purely spontaneous. At the same time there is another feature present, which is perhaps the most important and is itself related to the complexity of the experience. The more complex the group of tendencies, the more are alternative actions possible, and hence in the higher kinds of activity the consciousness that the action pursued is selected. On the other hand, the more self-contained a mental process is, the more it can be taken by itself, as in surrendering oneself to the pleasure of a warm bath, or indulging in a train of consecutive ideas, or taking in a sensation, the more passive I feel. Passivity seems to go with determinate direction, or, to use a convenient technical word, with univocal direction of my mind, and activity with a mental determination which admits more or less clearly apprehended alternatives, it goes with equivocal direction. Hence it is that activity and passivity are so curiously mingled in our experiences: as they are in desire which is eminently purposive, fixed upon its end to the exclusion of other and distracting suggestions, and at the same time blind and enforced; or, in the kind of inference in which, as we say, the conclusion is forced upon us, where we feel

passive in so far as we are constrained by the object which admits no alternative course, and yet intensely active so far as it is we ourselves who, in virtue of the sum of various tendencies which make up our interest, arrive at the result. Hence, too, we can readily understand why there is no clear demarcation in our experience between passive and active processes.

Whether this account of the distinction between activity and passivity is accurate or not, in both conditions there is activity in the wider sense, and I have been constantly using phrases which anticipate what I have to say about the nature of this process-consciousness, to which I now pass on. I can only describe mental activity in general in metaphorical terms, because of its extreme simplicity and its uniqueness. But the best term seems to me to be movement. In all my mental conditions, whether will, desire, inference, perception, sensation, I am aware of these movements, and these movements have what I must call direction and differ in direction. What happens in desire I have already indicated. When a whole interest is at work, my mind moves by several converging lines of tendency. As I pass from stage to stage of a train of ideas, I feel the change of direction from one thought to another. The simpler the condition the more difficult is the process to describe, but the process is there and verifiable. Sometimes I can only detect it through helping myself out by reference to my external movements. Thus I can verify that in enjoying a hot bath my mind goes on moving in the initial direction, and this direction is different from that of taking in a prolonged sound. Or I may be conscious in a sensation of the mental activity which is a suggestion of the name, as blue or yellow. Or, again, in perceptual process my activity is mental preparation for handling the object perceived, for responding to it in appropriate ways, anticipating the next stage in the action. Always I am conscious of moving from one point to another, which either may or may not be in the same direction.

In speaking thus of movement and change of direction, and I may add of rate of movement, I am of course obliged to use anticipatory terms derived from physical objects, describing not merely the mental activity as I am aware of it, but as it is connected with bodily processes which occur in the organism and more particularly in the brain. I make it clearer to myself by locating it in time or space in a picture of my brain. Tennyson says "as when a great thought strikes along the brain and flushes all the cheek." The second phrase describes only a consequence, but in all my thoughts, little or great and of all kinds, I verify the description that they strike along the brain. Now that I know what my brain is, I feel my thought occurring there, or, if not there, in some other part of my body. It is only as thus understood in connection with the bodily organism that I can say my mental activity is a movement with direction. But in this sense it is a movement, and does occur in time and space. In other words, my mental activity is always qualified by what, on the analogy of local signs, I must call signs of direction. When I change my thoughts from one topic to another, I have an experience which I can only compare to the shifting of the pieces of glass in a kaleidoscope when it is turned, and this experience is not the same as the movements of the eyes in which, with me, it is habitually expressed. Movements like these or like catching the breath, or the flushing of the cheek of which the poet speaks, may be present in various degrees, but these movements I can distinguish perfectly well from the movements, simple or complex, which I have described as mental, changing their direction with the subject matter, but always when made definite and explicit referred to the brain.

Now what makes one thought-process different from another is, I find, nothing but this difference of mental direction. It is not the object or content of the thought. When the object is different the direction of my activity is different, but the object has nothing to do with my mind. Moreover,

I must go on to add that when I say I am conscious of this activity, I mean that the activity so described is consciousness, and that I can find nothing else in consciousness except these activities. I sympathise very much with the spirit of certain recent inquiries which result in the declaration that consciousness does not exist, but I think the doctrine erroneous. I have no doubt that the thing called my consciousness exists, and that it is mental activity. But it is not different in quality according as I am conscious of blue or green, or the sun or the Pythagorean theorem. These things are not consciousness, but things to which consciousness refers, upon which it is a kind of reaction. All these things are different according as they are colour, or figure, or the like, but my consciousness is one and the same thing working only in different directions.

The most difficult and interesting thing to determine upon this psychological borderland is the place of sensation. That sensation belongs to the objective side of what is called (I take the phrase as I find it) the subject-object relation, would be readily admitted. But my language conflicts with a view widely entertained that a sensation itself is still psychical, and not as I am maintaining by examples, physical. I cannot in my examination of experience separate the sensation of green from the perception of a green leaf, except in respect of complexity. If I resolutely divest my mind of the last traces of the figment of an inner sense, which represents the objects of experience in some supposed subjective condition, then I find in a sensation nothing but mental activity directed upon what is called the content of the sensation, which content is nowhere found except in the external object. It seemed to me at one time that we might describe consciousness as a sort of thrill, and sensations as qualitatively distinct thrills of consciousness. But this now seems to me an erroneous description. It is not the quality of consciousness that differs, but its coefficient of direction. Accordingly green, red, smell, hunger, and the like

are but objects, doubtless of an exceedingly simple sort, which it is the business of metaphysics to describe. But these sensations, as we know them, I mean as sensations of red, green, have no psychical character, red, green. There correspond to them of course on the side of the organism various specialised mental processes. But the mental process has no character in it of colour, or smell, or sound. It has only a direction which varies with the object that excites the conscious activity. Sensations then are, so far as they can be called psychical, nothing but the simplest signs of direction. But it is only their simplicity which gives them any special claim for consideration. To every object perceived, imagined, desired, and the like, there correspond more or less complicated signs of direction.

I will add two corollaries which will put the thesis I am explaining in a different way:—

(1) What I have called mental activity is, in the usual language of psychology, conation, and what I am saying is tantamount to the assertion that the conative side of "experience" is the only thing which is mental. As for pleasure and pain, I am content as at present advised to regard them as modalities of the conative process. My thesis then, founded as I think on self-description, is that consciousness is conation and nothing else.

It may be as well to add one or two verifications of this summary description. The first is the law of association, which merely means that when the mind starts moving along one of a set of connected directions it goes on to move along the others. The second is the influence of feeling upon the course of thoughts, as, for example, in the selective influence of prejudice, where the effect of the presence of the feeling is not to call up certain thoughts but to begin the appropriate movements. In constructive creation the common phrase that a man's mind has struck into a new line is more than metaphorical. The passion or interest with which the worker is

inspired seems to direct him into a new mental path, and it is mainly when the antecedent motions are concealed from him that he attributes his new thoughts to outside influences to which he is passive. My last instance shall be that of split-off consciousness. Where an organism for some reason or other ceases to work completely as a whole, certain stimuli may fail to produce the nervous changes which are the condition of mental activity and yet at the same time may very well excite activity or consciousness in connection with other portions of the same system.

(2) It follows, secondly, that all consciousness is self-consciousness. There is no difference between these two things as if besides consciousness there were also a consciousness of consciousness. That way madness lies, for there is no reason why you should stop at consciousness of consciousness and not go on to a consciousness of that. On the other hand, we certainly have a consciousness of self when we take self to be the whole thing, body and mind, taken together, a composite thing. The self as described contains not only my mental activity but the body in which that mental activity is located, and which it comes to be aware of in the same way as it is aware of all external things, and it may go on to include all the things about which we occupy our minds. But all this embodiment of the self is but the privileged thing with which our mental activity is connected. Other things through their intimacy of relation with this body may seem at times to enlarge the bounds of our personality; and the habitual objects of our thoughts and desires enter in the same way into our personality. But whether it is our body, or psychology, or politics, which we regard as the chief constituent of our personality, what makes the personality mental is never these things but the mental activities which have them for their objects. The conscious self is always the reaction of consciousness upon its objects. We never have a superadded consciousness of this conscious part of the self.

So far I have been following, as I think, observation. It is a matter of observation that consciousness is mental activity, and it is a matter of observation that such consciousness is located, however vaguely, in the body. What I now add goes beyond observation. I have been considering consciousness as a property of a certain highly developed organism. It consists of reaction, of course unique in kind, of this organism upon objects which affect it. It is strictly comparable to life, also a unique phenomenon. Life is a set of reactions, running, pouncing, digestion, breathing, and the rest, upon certain stimuli. It varies in its direction according to the stimulus and the part of the organism which is employed. But in so far as these functions are vital, we have to say that the body exhibits a new quality not found in lower material systems, and the new quality is life. Suppose, now, your living being is also a conscious one (I do not know where, if at all, the difference in organic structure between a conscious and a living organism is to be found, but suppose that it has a brain), such an organism exhibits not only life but a fresh form of reaction, which is consciousness, conditioned, of course, by the lower forms of reaction, just as life is conditioned by physical and chemical processes. Conscious process is thus simply a phenomenon found in certain organisms, a new quality of such structures, but as distinctive as life.

As I conceive the matter there are in the world among physical objects certain physical objects whose structure is so developed that certain of their functions are not purely physiological but are consciousness. These functions, which constitute consciousness, are situated in the brain or other part of the neural system. These conscious reactions upon other objects than consciousness itself are what we call the consciousness of these objects, which is the stirring into life of consciousness in connection with those objects. How much consciousness shall know of them depends on the organism of which it is a function

or—to vary the language—which uses it* as an instrument. There is nothing in the nature of the case why a still higher organism should not exhibit an order of existence higher than mere consciousness and conditioned by it. The existence of consciousness as part of the life of the body is a fact revealed to consciousness through its more intimate relations with the body. I can thus find in consciousness nothing but a phenomenon, a part of the whole world of phenomena. There are psychical things in the world as well as physical. A psychical thing is mental activity. But I can find in it no mysterious indescribable activity such as Berkeley and some of his successors have found, but something definitely describable.

I have got on to the edge of metaphysics, just where what is called the theory of knowledge begins. But to go further would be to raise difficulties outside the psychological problem. I draw back, therefore, to psychology, in order to explain why in this discussion I made no difference between three things which are sometimes sharply distinguished, namely, activity itself, activity-consciousness and the consciousness of activity. As to the first of these phrases, it may be thought that consciousness may be an activity and yet there need not be a consciousness of it. This is really impossible. If consciousness is itself an activity and not merely dependent on some other activity (*e.g.*, physiological) that activity is conscious. The other distinction between activity-consciousness and consciousness of activity does not seem to me to possess the importance sometimes attached to it. It is convenient to distinguish an explicit from an undeveloped experience and you may designate the explicit consciousness by *of*. You may speak of change-consciousness and the consciousness of change, the latter being definite change. Consciousness of activity is nothing but the dim activity-consciousness standing out clear and

* This should have read "which it uses," but I leave the text unaltered because of Mr. Ward's subsequent reference.

distinct. On the other hand (and I suppose this is what is intended), if it is implied that I can yet be conscious of my mental activity in the same way as I am conscious of a bee, I believe the foregoing to have shown this to be erroneous. External things are related to consciousness which reacts upon them, but they *are* not consciousness. On the other hand, consciousness is not related to consciousness. I cannot attend to my attention as I attend to what I write. I can only when possessed by psychological interest contrive to make the different features in attention distinct. When I appear to turn a consciousness like desire or attention into an object like a bee it is only because I am considering it by help of the expression of it or the object (or content) of it. This might be expressed by saying that consciousness or mental activity can never be a presentation. I agree with this, but I think that the fact is improperly described. I should say simply that consciousness is not a physical thing.

2.—*By* JAMES WARD.

I FIND in Professor Alexander's opening paper passages which embody all the main features of mental activity as I understand it, and yet his position and mine are, I fear, radically different. I agree that, though we distinguish between activity and passivity, activity in a certain wider sense pertains to all experience,—that activity, namely, which is implied in consciousness. I agree further that the conscious or mental activity is in itself one and the same, working only in different 'directions.' By this I mean that it is what we call attention widely understood, attention now to sensory presentations, now to motor, now to presentations, now to representations and so on. When this 'direction' is determined for me, I am said to be passive, when it is determined by me, I am said to be active. I admit that the two are so far inseparable, in that I can never wholly

determine the objects to which I attend; we have no experience of creative activity. But I should still hesitate to say that there is no clear demarcation between the two. I admit also that activity in the narrower sense is always conative, but I do not find that "consciousness is conative and nothing else." Nor can I see how Professor Alexander's previous exposition has led up to such a thesis. It is true that when attention is non-voluntarily determined the subject is never wholly indifferent and so the situation as either pleasurable or painful entails at once a conative attitude. But the receptive, affective, and reactive constituents of such a total *psychosis* are still distinct, and Professor Alexander has himself distinguished them.* Finally I fully recognise "the extreme simplicity and uniqueness" of mental activity on which Professor Alexander also insists. But there we part.

"Because of this extreme simplicity and uniqueness," Professor Alexander continues, "I can only describe mental activity in general in metaphorical terms." I hold, on the contrary, that what is simple and unique can neither be described nor defined in *any* terms. We may indicate it and designate it; and since in any case it cannot be absolutely isolated, we may succeed in analysing more or less completely the complex in which it occurs, or the conditions on which it depends. And when, nevertheless, Professor Alexander tells us that mental activity is best described as "movement" it does not take long to see that the fitness of the simile is really due to the fact that he has in view precisely that kind of literal movement to which we have already metaphorically transferred the idea of activity. Movement pure and simple, mere change of position, is a kinematical concept and suggests neither activity nor passivity.

* The distinctness of the second, however, it must be allowed, Professor Alexander recognises in a very halting fashion, as "modalities of the conative process." But till Professor Alexander has explained himself further I can only take this to mean that affection and conation, though distinguishable, are not actually separable: this I admit.

Movement, in Newton's sense again, or momentum, implies complete inactivity or inertia, just as truly as does rest: only when there is some acceleration, some change, that is to say, either in rate or direction, do we talk of physical action. The history of this concept of physical causation, from the cruder anthropomorphism of pre-scientific thinking down to its dynamical interpretation in the present day, shows plainly that the notion of action was first imported into it from the sphere of conscious life and that it has been gradually but at length completely eliminated. I take it that nobody nowadays attributes activity to colliding bodies or to an electric discharge. We might as well say that the moon lights the sun as suppose that physical action throws any new light on mental activity.

It is true, however, that we talk freely of movements in connexion with mental activity and that in two senses, which Professor Alexander very properly distinguishes. There are certain literal movements connected with circulation, respiration and the like—determined probably through the sympathetic system of nerves—of which we are more or less dimly aware. But these we recognise as but the collateral consequences of mental activity. There are also other literal movements due to the so-called voluntary muscles, which are the direct outcome of mental activity, intentional movements. Still they are not themselves instances of mental activity but rather its effects, objects or end: in the language of Professor Alexander, they are the content upon which mental activity is directed. And this brings us to the second and metaphorical sense of movement, as when, for instance, we talk of movements of attention. The source of this figure is doubtless to be found partly in the pre-eminence as regards cognition which the sense of sight has attained for us: so we talk of the mind's eye, of the field and focus of consciousness. Partly it is to be found in the pre-eminence, as regards action, which belongs to the hand: so we talk of mental grasp, apprehending, comprehending, perceiving, conceiving, etc. But mental activity,

however strictly distinguished from its overt results, whether collateral or intended, is at any rate correlated to actual motions "in the organism and more particularly in the brain." And this fact seems to play hide and seek with us in a strange way throughout Professor Alexander's exposition: at any rate the transitions are so "kaleidoscopic" that I fail to see their logical connexion. If, nevertheless, I venture on a few remarks, I do so mainly in the hope of eliciting further explanations.

To begin them, in one place we find Professor Alexander saying: "always I am conscious of moving from one point to another." This seems to suggest the activity of attention as I should understand it, "my consciousness as one and the same thing working only in different directions," to use his own words. But alas! it seems there is here a double sense that keeps the promise to our ear and breaks it to our hope. For presently we find Professor Alexander saying: "Now that I know what my brain is, I feel my thought occurring there . . . It is only as thus understood that I can say my mental activity is a movement . . . But in this sense it *is* a movement and does occur in time and space." Why should what is felt as occurring in the body yield the experience of mental activity: what is it that singles out one kind of bodily occurrence as unique in this respect from the rest? The metaphorical sense of movement seems to have vanished and we have an objective physical movement, somehow apprehended as activity, in its stead. And yet this language would perhaps not seem so decisive* if we did not interpret it in the light of what is said later of consciousness as "a property of the organism," as "a reaction of this organism upon objects which affect it," as "simply a phenomenon *found* in certain organisms," which use it "as an instrument," etc. There is much beside in the details of Professor Alexander's exposition which to me is hopelessly

* For in his second paragraph Professor Alexander has expressly rejected William James's view of activity as "an error he has learned to avoid."

bewildering, but it would take far more time than I can claim to dwell upon these. I trust I have said enough to indicate my main difficulty. Professor Alexander tells us he has got "to the edge of metaphysics, just where what is called the theory of knowledge begins," and there he decides to stop. In other words, he has led us into a bog and there he proposes to leave us.

Thus in Professor Alexander's world there are physical things and there are psychical things and there are "composite things"—"body and mind taken together." Apparently they are all phenomena, though in what sense this most ambiguous term is understood is not clear. It would seem that the Pythagorean theorem along with blue and green is a phenomenon, though whether like the latter it is to be handed over to metaphysics for description does not appear. On the whole, if 'phenomenon' implies degrees of reality—the superiority lies on the physical side. For not only does Professor Alexander sympathise—and I take it the sympathy is entirely intellectual—with the "spirit" that has recently got so far as to declare that the psychical things do not exist:* he regards them as in any case but properties of certain physical objects whose structure is sufficiently developed. But how, if two things are "taken together," does one become the property or quality of the other? Well, of course they are only phenomena. And yet though phenomena and properties of objects, psychical things, *i.e.*, consciousnesses or mental activities, are not presentations. Naturally then we should expect to be told that they do not strictly admit of description, and Professor Alexander, as we have seen at the outset, practically said as much.

But yet he ends by saying that they are "definitely describ-

---

* A parallel case, I suppose, would be found in those physicists who sympathise with the hypothesis recently advanced that ions are only electric charges and that mass does not exist.

able."* Or, rather, he says this just as he reaches "the edge of metaphysics," but immediately he has drawn back into psychology he unsays it again. "When I *appear* to turn a (moment of) consciousness, like desire or attention, into an object, like a bee, it is only because I am considering it by help of the expression of it or the object (or content) of it." But the former is not "mental activity itself," and the latter "has nothing to do with the mind." So after all "I cannot attend to my attention as I attend to what I write." Perhaps I am reading my own meaning into this when I say that I agree with it entirely; for I certainly cannot reconcile it with other statements that Professor Alexander has made, least of all with his saying that "consciousness is nothing but a phenomenon."

Finally, I think that the advance from activity-consciousness—which, I suppose, is what Professor Alexander means by "mere consciousness"—to the consciousness of activity is much more than a convenient distinction.† In fact, the demand for a psychological account of this advance is precisely what Mr. Bradley has been urging these many years. And the very thorough and masterly exposition of his own view of it, in my opinion more than anything else, now requires and deserves examination. Professor Alexander refers to it somewhat incidentally, and so far as I follow his criticisms I agree

---

* At the same time, Professor Alexander animadverts on the mysterious indescribable activity which Berkeley and some of his successors are supposed to have found. Unfortunately, no references are given to Berkeley's works, and his deluded successes are not named. So far as I know, Berkeley never attempted to describe activity at all: he only insists that volition is the only activity of which we have any experience. Cf. *Works*, Fraser's edition, 1871, vol. i, pp. 170, 310.

† Don't talk of a consciousness of consciousness, says Professor Alexander, for that way madness lies, but he is prepared to entertain the idea of a higher organism that should "exhibit an order of existence higher than mere consciousness and conditioned by it." "Consciousness of consciousness" is not a very exact expression, but otherwise why is one position more sane than the other?

entirely. To put it in my own way—in psychology, Mr. Bradley appears to be what I have called a presentationist. In his articles on the "Definition of Will," for example, he starts from ideo-motor action, and talks of the self-realisation of an idea in a thoroughly Herbartian fashion, oblivious of the fact that if an idea verily is a self and shows its activity by expanding, invading, and what not, we have the whole problem of activity again on our hands. But presentation as a process implies the subject-object relation to which apparently Mr. Bradley confines the term consciousness. But he holds that there is a pre-relational stage of experience as feeling. What he has written on this topic strikes me, I confess, as obscure; but at the same time I feel strongly that obscurity must beset every attempt to penetrate beyond a consciousness in which relations are recognised, and ascertain how such a consciousness begins.* But our only hope of success in such adventures lies, I think, in the principle of continuity. Experience in which there is neither subject nor object seems to me unmeaning; so likewise a feeling which no one feels. There can, of course, at first be no reflexion: the subject we must suppose, feels and acts, acts and feels, and there is, we must also suppose, a changing something that affects it when it feels and changes when it acts.†

But we cannot suppose that the subject at the outset has any so-called "internal perception" of itself or of its states; for that, it is abundantly evident, implies a long course of intellectual construction. Surely, however, the absence of self-consciousness is no proof of the absence of a self. Let us now

---

* *Cf.* the discussion, "Consciousness and Experience," *Mind*, N.S. vol. ii, pp. 211 *ff.*

† It seems useless for the psychologist to debate the question as to which was first, the active or the passive phase: in fact, a sharp separation of the two is unwarranted, for we know nothing of either pure passivity or pure activity. Metaphysically we may say, *Am anfang war die That*, and that may incline us speculatively to insist on the logical priority of activity.

turn to an account which Mr. Bradley has given of feeling as he understands the term. "I take feeling," he says, "in the sense of the immediate unity of a finite psychical centre. It means for me, first, the general condition before distinctions and relations have been developed, and where as yet neither any subject nor object exists. And it means, in the second place, anything which is present at any stage of mental life, in so far as that is only present and simply is."* But we have a right to ask: What gives a "mass of feeling" unity and a centre in the absence of a subject, and what exactly does "mental life" imply? Relations and distinctions do not constitute their terms or *fundamenta*, how, then, could they be developed in the absence of these? Elsewhere, in discussing unity, Mr. Bradley asks: "Why and how can we call it a relation, when it is not a relation actually for us?" He continues: "It would never do for us simply and without any explanation to fall back on the 'potential,' for that, if unexplained, is a mere attempt at compromise between 'is' and 'is not.' But if the 'potential' is used for that which actually is, and which under certain circumstances is not manifest, the 'potential' may cease to be a phrase and may become the solution of the problem." Two and two simply are not four, but they are the ground of putting two and two together. So mental activity that is "only present and simply is" is not the apprehension of an agent acting, but it is the ground that makes such apprehension possible and is besides its necessary presupposition.

Like Professor Alexander, Mr. Bradley regards mental activity as a phenomenon. Herein lies the radical difference between us. He asks: "What is the content of activity as it appears to the soul at first in distinction from what it is as it is . . . for the soul later on," and complains that he has "failed throughout to get an intelligible reply." It never occurs to him that he has possibly asked an unintelligible

* *Appearance and Reality*, p. 459.

question in assuming that all experience consists of appearances. I do not suppose that Mr. Bradley intended to lay any stress on the different language that he has employed in speaking of activity as it *appears* to the soul at first and activity as it *is* for the soul later on. But at any rate I think it would be more correct to transpose the terms. Later on, the subject of experience may have what we loosely call an internal perception of itself acting and feeling, but in this perception and distinct from its object the subject immediately acts and feels; and that it was true of its experience as long as that experience was entitled to the name. This percept we may call presentational, the immediate act of feeling we cannot. The phrase a "feeling of" is not, it is admitted, very exact. We may talk of an "apprehension of" with perfect propriety, but in immediate experience the subject, it seems to me, can only be said to feel and act. Later on, largely through intersubjective intercourse and reflexion, it may come not simply to be a self, not simply to act and feel, but to know itself as having acted and felt. "Wherever you meet a psychologist," says Mr. Bradley, who takes this experience as elementary, "you will find a man who has never made a serious attempt to decompose it or ever resolutely faced the question as to what it contains."* "Wherever you meet a psychologist," I have replied, "who essays to resolve himself and his experiences wholly into content or phenomena, there you find a man who, because he can't see his own eyes, seems to think he hasn't any. Out of 'psychical machinery' he tries to develope its own presuppositions, and smuggles into it what is really distinct from it and is its own motive-power." The psychology I am trying to defend, Mr. Bradley calls a "preposterous psychology." That epithet, I reply, is more appropriate to a psychology that can only help itself along by means of metaphors that imply and presuppose the very fact it is trying to explain.

---

* *Appearance and Reality*, p. 116.

3.—*By* Carveth Read.

It is a paradox that consciousness and activity are the commonest things in the world, and the most familiar to all of us, and yet we cannot agree in describing them. It is another paradox that the commonest cause of misunderstanding has long been recognised to lie in the ambiguity of terms, and yet we make very little progress in agreeing upon definitions. Even if we sometimes seem to be agreed upon the use of an important word, presently a new interest awakens, or an old interest acquires new life; and then, if its adherents think it would be strengthened by using that word in another sense, they make no scruple about altering it: like that sort of Economist who hopes to add dignity to labour by calling it "capital." Something of this kind is at present the matter with "consciousness." For a good while this term, when used without qualification, has stood with many writers for the whole of noetic experience: here and there the more venturesome may have extended it to cover the supposed anoetic experience of man, or animals, or what-not; but for our present discussion we may leave them out. "Consciousness," as denoting all noetic experience, content, or matter, as well as form, has been a term in common use; but now Realism or, more particularly, perceptive Realism has come into favour; and it seems to be thought that the doctrines of perceptive Realism require for their effective statement such a limitation of the term "consciousness" as to exclude from it the content of experience altogether, or to admit as little as possible; so that it shall mean not much more than the form or process of experience. Strict limitation of it to form or process is difficult.

For my own part, whilst strongly sympathising with the new Realism, so far as it asserts the objectivity, stability, substantiality of the world as it is known to us, I see nothing in this doctrine incompatible with the use of the term "consciousness"

as equivalent to noetic experience, content and form. There is, in fact, no opposition between empirical Realism and Berkleyan Idealism. It seems to be supposed that consciousness must be the same thing as subjectivity; but it has been explained over and over again that Object and Subject stand for a distinction within consciousness; and this seems to me to be true. To say that the sky is consciousness is a paradox; but to say that the sky as known is not consciousness is a contradiction. Now, what is the sky except as it is known? Any object directly known, or that can be brought into the focus of attention, I call either a phenomenon or a representation. If it is perceived in space it is an object in the full sense of the term, or a phenomenon; if it is an image of such an object, and not in space (that is, not definitely modified by my own movements) it is a subjective object, or a representation. But all that region of experience which is never an object of direct attention, always a matter of marginal awareness, is not a phenomenon nor yet a representation; and this comprises all feeling and conation. There is also a kind of experience, namely, meaning, that clings to all objects and is normally marginal, but may usually, in some measure, be brought into focus if we have an interest in doing so; it can be brought into focus so far as it can be resolved into images. Phenomena, then, are objects in consciousness; but consciousness is not a phenomenon, for it is not in space; nor a representation, for it is not even in time. It has no ascertainable limits of any kind, and both space and time are constructions within it. The subjectivity of experience is equally profound and inexhaustible. There lie all the meaning and all the value of direct cognition. It responds to every modification of cognition. It is the commentary upon everything that is seen or thought of. And if we pause upon any object and call the meaning of it into the light of attention, our subjectivity is in no way impoverished, for this new object has its own meaning and its own value. To treat the known object or phenomenon as

something independent is a gratuitous surrender to common-sense and to the less intelligent students of physical science, who have never advanced a single argument to justify their naïve assumption on epistemological grounds. It is true that the world or the sky is not merely my consciousness; but everyone's who will look. It belongs to generic consciousness; and it may be asked what becomes of it if we do not look, or if we all fall asleep. Heaven knows. For me, as a matter of belief, it then has its own being, as it is not known to man. But so far from gaining objectivity under that condition, it is reduced to a bare idea. There certainly is no science of it. Where is the chemistry or the physics of any world but the waking world?

Prepositions are most confusing vocables: they are always trying to put asunder what God has joined together. We often hear that the world is present *to* consciousness, that it exists *for* consciousness. A sense of the inadequacy of merely human speech leads others to add the prepositions together, and to declare that it is present *to* and *for* consciousness. But all these phrases have the fault of separating consciousness as an abstraction from the actuality of experience. There are not two things, one of which can be *to* or *for* the other. There is only one thing, the known world. The least pernicious prepositions in this connection are *in* and *of*. One is tempted to speak of the content *of* consciousness; but consciousness is not a bag. I feel inclined, for this reason, to object to the word "content" in this use of it, and to urge that the phrase "matter of consciousness" is better. But, waiving that, I shall urge that what is sometimes called the "content of consciousness" is consciousness itself, and so are all the changes that occur in that content, the processes, and the laws or forms of them.

It is, I think, peculiarly difficult to reconcile any other view with physiological psychology, which treats conscious processes as functions of the neural system, more particularly

of the brain. For the best ascertained doctrine of that study is that there are localised areas in the brain, the excitement of which gives rise to the various kinds of sensations, that is, to "content." The simpler lines of communication between these areas, corresponding with the complication of sensations, may also be said to be known. But what it is in the brain that corresponds to the perception of objects in space, and to other important processes, such as reasoning and volition, may still be described as "clotted hypothesis." However, it is an indisputable deduction from this theory, so far as it goes, that the body itself is a phenomenon in consciousness—if consciousness is a phenomenon, the body is an epiphenomenon—; and that space is a consciousness-construction, so as to abolish any difficulty that may be raised to the conceiving of the sky as consciousness. Coleridge commented on the danger (in the direction of heresy) of saying that "God is everywhere": rather, he urged, we must declare that "all things are *present to* God." Now cut out the prepositional phrase with its illusory separativeness, and that is true of the world of every mind according to its capacity.

That sensations and sense-qualities are consciousness may be seen from this, that they are inseparable from feeling. Objective themselves, they are never known without this subjective reaction: which may be different, or similar, for different sensations, or for the same sensation at different times; but is never wanting. This variability of our feelings enables us to distinguish the sensation from them, but not to separate it from them. A similar connection holds between sensations and conation. And in this way we may interpret the "subject-object relation." It is not a relation between independent things, but corresponds with one of the contrasts of focal and marginal knowledge. In perception things are focal and ideas are marginal; in reflection ideas are focal and things are marginal; so that percepts and ideas may both be considered as objects; but both in the attitude of perception and of reflec-

tion, feeling and conation are marginal, and are always subjective. We cannot separate these elements of experience and call some of them consciousness and others not: consciousness and experience are identical.

Now, as to Activity, it seems to me to be, in its most general sense, the same thing as change of experience. All change of experience is activity of consciousness; and we may say that activity of consciousness is measured by the number of distinguishable changes that occur in an unit of time. These changes are both objective and subjective. If I watch the traffic in Oxford Street, there is the procession of vehicles and of animals of various species, with their noises and odours; the ideas they excite of how—

> every man hath business and desires,
> Such as they are,

and the purposelessness of all their purposes; and back of all this (as they say in America) there is a subjective crowd of feelings and impulses. The physical factors of this scene impress me with a sense of force, which makes me keep out of their way; and at the same time I attribute them to causes. The causes lie beyond my present experience; but can only be thought of as if I witnessed them. Under that condition they can be conceived very definitely as previous changes amongst similar objects; but the force of them cannot be definitely conceived, except by identifying it with the causes of what is happening and to happen next. Hence the whole physical activity is reduced to changes, preceded by changes, and to be followed by others in a definite order.

Do the changes that meanwhile go on amongst my ideas and in the subjective crowd of feelings and conations require any other analysis? They all seem to have their antecedents, though their relation to those antecedents is much less easily reducible to order under definite concepts than are events in the physical world. Some of them give an impression of force, such as the occasional conations involved in walking under

conditions that do not permit of an easy rhythm being established, turnings of the eyes or head, various impulses and inhibitions, and perhaps an effort to think of something else and far away. But in all this I find nothing but changes, antecedent changes, consequent changes, and the sensations of conation, which, some of them, obviously, are strain and pressure sensations easily localisable, whilst others have the same general character, though not so definitely localised. Throughout, the subjective activity is, like the physical, nothing but change of experience.

The consciousness of activity is, then, in the first place, a consciousness of this activity of consciousness in its totality. This is, for the most part, identical with the activity of consciousness, the content in all its processes. It is possible, indeed, to have an occasional awareness of such activity in a peculiar way, a momentary reflection of it, highly symbolic in presentation but rich in meaning, an epitome of experience, which I take to be one of the things that are sometimes indicated by the term "self-consciousness." But this momentary reflection enters, of course, as one change into the stream of changes; and its natural position is marginal; for if it reaches the centre of the stream the whole direction and character of the activity is diverted.

But "consciousness of activity" is naturally a narrower notion than "consciousness of the activity of consciousness": it means consciousness of self-activity—of the psycho-physical organism in thinking, observing, running; for, as a matter of experience, when I am running my mind runs; and when I am thinking my body thinks. It is true that when a man is running his mind may do a good deal besides running; and that when thinking he may sometimes almost forget that he has a body. But the attitude and behaviour of his body, its health or discomfort, influence all his thoughts, and it is the psycho-physical whole that constitutes himself, his individuality in relation to other individuals.

It may be said: "But, surely, all activity of consciousness is an activity of the psycho-physical organism, and, therefore, self-activity"; and there is a sense in which that is true. Still, metaphysics is an affair of distinctions; and good metaphysics draws the right distinctions. In this case we must distinguish within the activity of consciousness that region in which the self is relatively active from that in which it is relatively passive. The expanse of the sky or the traffic of the street are passive experiences, as near to the abstract physical as anything can be; but when I save myself at a crossing from the thunder of a brewer's wain, or reflect with scorn how all such trumpery is doomed to fly over the back side of the world, these are experiences of self-activity, or activities of the psycho-physical organism; and the poetical reflection on trumpery comes as near as anything can to the abstract mental. But no abstraction has real existence.

Consciousness of activity usually involves some effort and choice, as Professor Alexander has said; and although unable to identify it with conation, which seems to me to be a factor of the marginal content, I agree that conation is a character of it. Conation is not a presentation in the same sense that feeling is not, namely, in as much as it is marginal. But to separate conation from the matter of consciousness is possible only on condition of limiting such matter to objects (things and images); and excluding the meaning of them and the feelings and reactions they excite. Objects and presentations thus segregated, however, are entirely unknown; they have no significance and (strictly) no existence. Consciousness of activity is that portion of the activity of consciousness which is determined by interest in an end. This implies conation, and the liability of having to make an effort; but the activity bears no proportion to effort; for it includes cognition, which may be extensive and varied, in happy hours, with very little effort; and at other times (alas!), in spite of the utmost exertion, activity may be small.

Thus far I had written before receiving Professor Ward's paper. Having very few leisure hours in the week, I foresaw that if I should wait to begin my own paper until his came to hand, it would be impossible to get through my own task quickly enough to leave the next man a reasonable time for reflecting on the course of the discussion. It was fortunate that I did so; for otherwise I might have felt embarassed to find much to say beyond the assenting to Professor Ward's criticisms. There is, however, one point at which he has agreed with Professor Alexander, which to me seems questionable, namely, whether conation is resolvable into strain sensations. He has not enlarged upon this; but it may not be erroneous to assume that he agrees with the views of Professor Stout in the *British Journal of Psychology* (July, 1906). Professor Stout there argues that if conation were identical with motor sensations, "the intensity of conation would be simply identical with the amount of motor sensation connected with it. But this is not so. Conation may be as strong in giving the finishing touch to a house of cards as in lifting a heavy weight." In every bodily action, however, there is a great deal more than conation, namely, the special adjustments required by it, which may call forth very different degrees of effort. Conation is distinguished from particular voluntary actions as being something common to them all. To abstract this common character is difficult: but so far as it can be done it appears to me to be probably true that the intensity of conation is proportionate to the motor sensations involved; or, more correctly, to the motor sensations and images; for, to the best of my judgment, "felt tendency" consists of the images or memory of former conations by which we anticipate the action now proposed. The difficulty of forming an opinion upon this point is due to the marginal position of the experience to be analysed; you can only watch it out of the corner of your eye. It is the same kind of difficulty as one finds in trying to discriminate qualities of pleasure.

The consciousness of activity, then, I take to be the consciousness of changes of experience so far as they are brought about by the interest of the psychophysical subject, or empirical self. In Psychology and Epistemology this is as far as I can get; but I had supposed that the Aristotelian Society was concerned in some measure with Ontology; and I should have been glad to hear its opinions upon the good old-fashioned doctrine that all activity is activity of the soul: a belief which, for my own part, I can neither verify nor relinquish.

4.—*By* G. F. STOUT.

I AGREE substantially with Dr. Ward in his criticism of Professor Alexander's paper and Mr. Bradley's views, and the points which he urges seem to me sufficient as a basis of discussion without my attempting to add much new matter. I shall therefore only make one comment on Professor Alexander's general position. I fail to see the logical connexion between his statement that "consciousness," or mental activity, is nothing but a phenomenon and his positive account of the nature of consciousness. He seems to me first to concede everything that is meant in asserting that consciousness is not a phenomenon and then to make a complete change of front by affirming that it is nothing but a phenomenon. The term *phenomenon* may be taken in two senses. It may be taken to mean an appearance in distinction from that to which the appearance appears. Now, from this point of view, Professor Alexander clearly recognises that activity or consciousness is not phenomenal. It is, according to him, directed to objects, but is not itself an object; for there is "no consciousness of consciousness." In the second sense, a phenomenon is so called, inasmuch as it is regarded as the appearance of something other than itself. It comes before the mind as something to be interpreted by developing its implications and connexions within a

systematic order of inter-related elements. From this side, also, Professor Alexander virtually admits that consciousness is not phenomenal, as sensations and material things are. Sensations, he tells us, are known only as elements of these spatial and temporal complexes which we call physical objects. And, I presume, he would admit that physical objects are known only as belonging to the spatial and temporal context of the material world. But mental activity, he seems to say, is not an element in this systematic order of relations. It is not an object nor an element of objects, but quite disparate in nature from anything objective. Even though it is only found in connexion with living organisms at certain stages of organic development, yet it cannot, in Professor Alexander's view, be itself a constituent element of these organised bodies. For, if he said this, he would be regarding consciousness as one special item among others distinguished from the and related to red or as green or as red or green may be distinguished from and related to each other, or to the physical conditions on which they depend. But this is irreconcilable with his whole position and, in particular, with his statement that "*all* consciousness is self-consciousness." For this implies that consciousness is not a special objective item co-ordinate with others, but rather an inseparable aspect of all knowledge, whatever may be its special object. It cannot, then, be in this sense that consciousness is phenomenal. What then does Professor Alexander mean by a phenomenon?

Professor Read introduces what he has to say on activity by a discussion of the nature of consciousness. This part of his paper I find it difficult to follow. In the first place, it contains what looks like an explicit inconsistency. We are told that "what is sometimes called the 'content of consciousness' is consciousness itself"; and it is plain from the context that under "content of consciousness" Professor Read includes whatever is in any way known or thought of, so that he must regard "phenomena and representation" as contents of

consciousness, and therefore as identical with the consciousness of them. But in seemingly point blank contradiction to this position, we are also told that "consciousness is not a phenomenon, for it is not in space; nor a representation, for it is not even in time." I do not find the difficulty removed or even mitigated by the statement that there are other contents of consciousness besides phenomena and representations in space or time. For, if we adhere strictly to the identification of consciousness and its content, this only means that, besides these, there are other kinds of consciousness. Nor am I helped by the further statement that space and time are themselves contents of consciousness. For, abiding by the identification of consciousness and its content, all that can be logically deduced from this is that some consciousness forms part of other consciousness. It would seem that further explanation is required here.

Again, if I seek for Professor Read's positive reason for this identification, I find that he contents himself with alleging an inherent self-contradiction in any other view. "To say that the sky as known is not consciousness," he urges, is "a contradiction." But it is so only if we already assume that "being known" and being consciousness are indistinguishable. Everyone admits that *knowing* is consciousness. The real question is whether what is known is simply identical with the knowing of it. This seems to me no more self-evident than it is self-evident that bread as digested is simply identical with the digesting of it. Doubtless, there is essential correlation, but every relation must have two terms, and the fact that one term a enters into the relation is not distinguishable from the fact that the other term b enters into it.

Again, I do not find Professor Read's appeal to physiological psychology at all helpful. The psychological doctrine which he regards as especially important and relevant is that the body itself is a "phenomenon in consciousness." But, according to his own account of what a phenomenon is, this ought to mean

merely that the body is something known and known as existing in space. We scarcely need physiological psychology to inform us of this. And how can it strengthen Professor Read's argument? Apparently he is here resting his case on the assumption that what physiological psychology teaches is, not only that the body is known, but that it is known as being merely a complex of sensations, and the further assumption that sensations are mental existences inasmuch as they exist only in being experienced by an undivided mind, and again on the additional assumption that there is no possible distinction between sensations, so regarded, and the knowing of them. But all these suppositions are disputable, and two of them, the first and the last, appear to me to be false. Neither our own body nor any other body is known to us merely as a complex of sensations. The knowledge of material things includes, throughout its whole development, the thought-reference of a content derived from sensuous presentation to what Kant calls a "transcendental object." And even if we confine ourselves to mere sensations, yet the knowing of these sensations, involving, as it does, recognition, discrimination, identification, comparison, etc., seems to me distinguishable from the existence and qualities of the sensations which are recognised, discriminated, identified, or compared. I cannot, of course, discuss these large questions further in the present paper. What I wish to bring out is merely that Professor Read is making, consciously or unconsciously, highly disputable assumptions.

There is one view put forward by Professor Read in his preparatory remarks which has a specially obvious and direct bearing on the topic of our present discussion. I refer to his distinction between phenomena on the one hand, and feeling and conation on the other. According to Professor Read the difference is that phenomena are objects of direct attention, whereas we have only a marginal awareness of feeling and conation. I am not at all sure that our awareness of feeling

and conation always is marginal. Certainly this hardly seems to apply to my dissatisfaction with a toothache. But I waive this point in order to deal with another which seems more essentially relevant. The question I wish to raise is this. Supposing that feeling and conation were as definitely and directly objects of attention as "phenomena" are, would they cease to be subjective and themselves become phenomena? To me it seems clear that they would not. For there would still remain the ultimate distinction founded on the relation of Subject and Object. Being dissatisfied, attending, desiring, hoping, and fearing, all imply something with which we are dissatisfied, to which we attend, or which we desire, hope, or fear. This something is what we call the object of these processes, and the processes are contrasted with their objects as subjective. The distinction, as we know it, is quite independent of the special manner in which we may be supposed to know it.

Professor Read is comparatively brief in his direct treatment of Activity. I select for comment three points—his distinction between activity in general and self-activity; his view of the relation between activity and effort; and his view of the relation of activity to motor sensation. As regards the first point, he proposes to call all "change of experience" activity of consciousness. My objection to this is very simple. Whatever licence we may allow ourselves in the use of terms, we ought, at least, to refrain from applying them in such a way as to obliterate the very distinctions they are intended to express But Professor Read's general activity would also include all that we mean by passivity. It is like proposing to include under the same term, *husband*—both husbands and wives. Unless we deliberately intend to confuse ourselves, we must confine the term *mental activity* to what Professor Read calls self-activity. When the "mind runs," it is *pro tanto* active; but when it is tossed in a blanket, it is *pro tanto* passive. Yet there may be the same amount of change in both cases.

As regards effort, Professor Read holds that "in spite of the utmost exertion, activity may be small." This can only mean that what we call unsuccessful activity is *pro tanto* not activity at all. I submit that this is a very inconvenient restriction of the use of the word, and not at all consonant with ordinary usage. Surely it is better to say that we are active in making an attempt, whether the attempt is successful or not, —that we are active in seeking, whether or not we succeed in finding. Activity is to be regarded as the presupposition of the distinction between success and failure.

Professor Read's view of the relation of motor sensation to conative consciousness seems to be as follows. By no means all motor sensation is felt as conation; but some of it is,—a vague residuum, difficult to isolate by abstract analysis. Now, I simply put one question. How are the muscle, joint, and tendon-sensations which are identical with or proportionate to conative consciousness distinguished from other muscle, joint, and tendon-sensations? The difference in their nature is far more marked than that between those connected with movements of the arm, leg, or scalp.

On what physiological conditions can the distinction be surmised to depend?

5.—*Reply by* S. Alexander.

Mr. Ward's fundamental difference from me on questions of theory of knowledge has led him to certain misapprehensions of my meaning. These I desire to correct, gratefully acknowledging criticisms which compel me to speak more accurately, though not to change my mind.

First of all, he objects, I declare mental activity to be simple and unique, and yet afterwards to be definitely describable. In calling mental activity, or consciousness, unique, I mean, that it possesses a character which we must accept as a new fact in

the universe, like redness or life. But as I may describe red as a colour, I may justifiably connect mental activity or process with process in general. And I may go on to describe other properties which I find out about it, and this I have attempted to do. The mere fact that we can say that mental activity has direction and has rate is enough to show it to be describable. Again, and this I lay stress on, though mental activity as such, as having the peculiar character of consciousness, can only be indicated, we have it occurring in various complexities: it is simple in sensation, more complex in perception, extremely complex in volition. And I take the object of Psychology to be to describe and distinguish these various grades of complexity.

Next, and this is my answer to his second charge, one of the properties I discover in mental process as such is that it has a definite place in space. Mr. Ward says that I first say it is only metaphorically movement, and then go on to say that it is literally a movement, and a movement to which I have transferred the idea of activity; and he then points to the history of physical activity as having got rid of this idea of activity. This is really quite a misapprehension. When I speak of physical movement I mean physical process as it occurs in the physical world without imputing to it activity, without any theory about it at all, and when I say that I feel mental activity occurring in connection with movement in my brain, I mean only that it occurs in that portion of space, and is experienced by me as occurring in my brain. I see no more difficulty in this than in a well-known proposition, that mind is situated at the synapses of the neurones; only of course I cannot discover this last by inspection, whereas I do discover by inspection that mental process is connected with some portion, however vaguely felt, of my brain. Mr. Ward asks, why should what is felt as occurring in the body yield the experience of mental activity? I venture to plead that we should never ask why should or should not things be so, we

should only ask if they are so, and if we find this is the case, make our account accordingly. To me the matter is one of fact, and I can find no mistake in my own description. I need not again allude to what I have already said: that in locating my mental activity in my brain I am using my acquired knowledge of brain, and not direct inspection. But apart from this, when I say that mental process is located in movements of the brain, I am saying no more than I say when I say that the tree under which I am writing is planted at the edge of the lawn. When, therefore, Mr. Ward accuses me of kaleidoscopic transitions (I forgive him this indulgence of his wit), he has not quite seen that I am trying to describe whatever I can find to say about my consciousness of activity without making any presuppositions of any sort. It is a further step, not of inspection but of theory founded upon it, when I go on to simplify by declaring not only that mental activity is found in the movements in the brain, but that it is essentially a movement in the brain with a new property of consciousness. There is no greater difficulty in this than in saying that a body has life. Life is not merely mechanical, and yet it is a property of something which is mechanical.

At every point that I come into conflict with Mr. Ward it is not upon psychological but upon epistemological ground. He complains of me that I have led the discussion to the edge of the bog and stopped there. Well, I had to stop somewhere, and I thought, and think, it all important to be so prepared by description of experience as to be able to find a path through the bog. This path I think I dimly see; I also think I see Mr. Ward out of the path. I wish that the hand I can offer him were not so weak, or that I had any hope of his accepting it. But I can hope to remove misapprehensions. In the first place I have used the unfortunate word phenomenon. I have made up my mind that I shall never use the word phenomenon again without carefully defining its meaning. How Mr. Stout can say that I describe the mind as if it were

not a phenomenon passes my comprehension. I have said that consciousness is a property of a certain sort of brain. How, then, can it be other than one thing among a number of other things? To suppose that mind to be a phenomenon must be an appearance to something else is to suppose that the only phenomena are physical things. But, in fact, I meant by the word almost nothing at all. When I speak of phenomena I only mean things which are or claim to be definitely verifiable or inferable facts, as opposed to something that is merely symbolical. Again, when I say that it is the business of Metaphysics to describe what sensations are, I mean only that it is its business to explain the difference between an object so far as it is sensed, or perceived, or imagined, or conceived. All these things—sensations, perceptions, conceptions—are for me objects and part of the real world. I was under the impression that many thinkers (and I thought Mr. Ward was one of them, probably mistakenly) do not regard mental activity as merely a natural fact, but as something on which in some way natural facts depend. In the next place, when I somewhat incautiously speak of mind as a thing, and also of the thing made up of body and mind, I do not mean that mind may exist apart from body; on the contrary, mind is the property of a certain kind of body. Next, Mr. Ward refuses to assent to my proposition, that the only things mental are conation and feeling. There is, he urges, a receptive constituent in the psychosis. Now, here I venture to repeat my description. I take green. There is, of course, a receptive attitude, but it is a conation, though a passive one. There is nothing in green, as green, which is mental. When I have the sensation green, my consciousness works in a particular direction, and that is all. As to feeling, I admit, of course, the incompleteness of my position. But feeling and willing stand on quite a different footing from presentation, and what I mean is, that if you want to know of what stuff the mind is made, you must look to conation; and at present it seems to me that pleasure and pain

belong to the stuff of mind, and that they are properties of conation like its direction.

But now, this being so, my epistemology at present is only this; that the cognition of the external world is a reaction upon the external world in which mental activity, varying in direction and complexity, is evoked. Of course, you cannot have mental action without things to evoke it. Neither can an animal have life without air to breathe. But the relation of cognition is, I think, precisely of the class of organic reactions; the only difference is in the terms of the relation. The reagent, which is conscious of the physical world, is the one which has the property of consciousness. I admit and insist that things are related to the mind, and the mind to things. But the relation is one of reaction. You cannot, therefore, say the physical things in any sense depend upon the mind. But now, when I have recognised that mind is one sort of thing among things, then I am prepared to see that its activity is of the same genus as physical activity. The naïve mind thinks physical process is one of conscious volition. We have got rid of that. But have we got rid of the fundamental fact of continuity in change? This I find in its simplest form in mental activity. I find it also in physical process. And I believe that the same thing is true of all the so-called categories: they are found both in physical things and in mind, and are most easily recognisable in mind. At any rate, as regards the particular category of causality, I reject the teaching of Hume and accept that of Locke, and I may observe by the way that according to the description which I have given of mind, mind is nothing but that part of things which Locke calls Ideas of Reflection.

Of course, I know that in supporting the beliefs of the common mind I am guilty of the philosophical paradox of declaring that the mind which knows things is only one among the things which it knows (and the other things which possibly it never can know, but which other existences might know). This is the paradox to which Lady Welby, with her usual pene-

tration, has referred in the appended note.* That it is no paradox at all is with me, at present, an intuition, and I am trying continually, without satisfying myself, to express it in terms which shall be convincing to others: I mean, which shall enable them to put themselves at my point of view and see with my eyes. All I can say at present is this. Here are two things, A and B; B is physical, A is also physical, but has mind. When B calls forth a mental reaction in A, A is conscious of B, and at the same time aware of itself. Let A be myself. I know things and am aware of myself. But myself is my awareness, the thing of which I am aware is not myself. To use a phrase which I have learned from Mr. Stout in conversation, the "of" in the phrase "I am aware of myself," is the "of"

---

* Lady Welby sends to the meeting the following note:—

"On the occasion of the symposium on 'the Nature of Mental Activity,' I venture to suggest the need of a previous question, which I cannot discover to have been definitely asked with reference to modern knowledge, still less satisfactorily answered. The question is, Who or What is to consider and pronounce upon the subject? If we answer, Man, what, *in this context*, do we mean by 'Man'? Do we mean Some one able, for the purpose in hand, to dissociate himself entirely from the matter under consideration, so as to arrive at a trustworthy, because an impartial, judgment,—that of a third party? That is, assuming an attitude apart from mental activity, do we propose, as beings infra- or supra-mental, to discuss the nature of what, for present purposes, is other than ours? I imagine that various theories are to be criticised, and others formulated or adumbrated. Does this involve mental activity or no?

"There are, of course, many cases when what belongs to us, and can only in a secondary sense be identified with us, is and must be discussed by us. But how do we propose to discuss and decide on the *nature* of that which alone discusses and decides? Is there not something 'circular' in this process?

"It may be objected that, from this point of view, the psyche cannot discuss psychology. Well, everywhere there is surely needed some kind of ultimate reference or arbiter, some relatively independent critic? If so, this ought to be clearly defined, and named as distinct from, while including, 'mind.'

"For, as we are, does not our use of 'mind' throw us back into the same perplexity which the discussion is to remove? Do we not need a yet anonymous third factor: a speaker, in fact, who can detach himself from 'mind' in discussing its 'nature?'"

of apposition, as in Locke's phrase, "the idea of a sensation"; when I am aware of the tree, the "of" is the "of" of reference to something upon which I react. But just because there is awareness in A, B is said to be presented to A. Now A, the feeling, perceiving, thinking thing, talks; and it feels itself, and it knows B, and describes B by words. Afterwards, it applies to itself the words which it has first used about B, and then it is said to describe itself. It just puts into words the two parts of the world of which it is aware. But the things in the world are there independently of B's awareness of them, and for all I know there may be things in the world of which A never can be aware, for want of the means to respond to them. Mr. Ward thinks this notion as insane as the consciousness of consciousness. But the difference is this, that I cannot stop at two terms of the last series, and when I go on to three terms my head begins to spin. Carry me along to four or five terms and I am in Colney Hatch. I apprehend no such danger in forecasting another kind of being to whom my consciousness might lie open as a book, in the same way as life lies open to me, to my consciousness. I admit the strangeness of the conception, that things in the world should exist in their own right, and that yet there is one among them, my mind, which knows the others. But the strangeness disappears with familiarity. It is the business of mind to know itself and other things.

Of course, I am well aware of all the questions which are thus left over, to be settled by Metaphysics, or theory of knowledge. The problems of memory, of the existence of the past, of error, of imagination; how I can by dint of my mental activity call up in imagination objects which yet are not myself; how my memory brings before me things which have no present existence. I have no brief answer to these problems. If I had been required to answer them, I should not have undertaken the discussion. But I see no reason why in Philosophy, any more than in any other science, we should refrain from dealing with one portion of what we know to be true,

just because we have not complete comprehension of the whole. I recognise no difference of method between Philosophy and the other sciences. I see that we have scientific knowledge when we use the utmost effort to depersonalise ourselves so as accurately to reflect the things about us. We depersonalise ourselves in Philosophy by describing the facts we find in the whole of our experience, and not asking what must be, nor seeking for logical connection where we only find juxtaposition, try to confine ourselves to what we see.

6.—*Reply by* Carveth Read.

Figure to yourselves my astonishment at finding that a series of propositions that seemed to me self-evident may be regarded as altogether obscure by another mind that I had been accustomed to trust.

Phenomena and representations, I say, are contents of consciousness, and, therefore, identical with the consciousness of them. They all occur in space or time, or in both; and therefore consciousness is not a phenomenon, for it is not in space or time. On the contrary, space and time are constructions or arrangements of phenomena or representations in consciousness. This is intuitively clear. If it be objected that, at any rate, consciousness is the totality of related phenomena, together with the marginal commentary upon them, I reply that this is what I have said: all things are present in consciousness, for I certainly assume that there is no consciousness of nothing.

Whether the sky as known is consciousness? Again, the affirmative is self-evident to me. What is known is identical with the knowing of it so far as we can know it. It is quite useless to seek amongst phenomena for any simile for what is called the relation of consciousness to its object, because there

is no such relation; there are not two terms. I see no analogy between the digesting of bread and the elaboration of cognitions.

My appeal to physiological Psychology was made in reply to Professor Alexander's position, that consciousness is "simply a phenomenon found in certain organisms": on the contrary, I say, on the physiological theory the body is a phenomenon in consciousness. But I did not refer to Professor Alexander directly: knowing well what was in store for him. Professor Stout says my deduction is not good, because "the knowledge of material things includes, throughout its whole development, the thought-reference of a content derived from sensuous presentation, to what Kant calls 'a transcendental object.'" But we must distinguish the knowledge of a thing as such from our knowledge of it in analysis. Physiological Psychology knows nothing of material things; and I am justified in saying that it resolves the body as known into the rawest material of consciousness. A material thing as known is, in my opinion, referred to a transcendental object, but only by what I have called an "indicative or orectic judgment," because the transcendental object is never a knowable term. I agree, of course, that the raw materials of sensation are very different from an elaborated phenomenon.

I also admit that the line between focal and marginal consciousness is far from clearly marked, and that in this connection toothache has often given me trouble. In fact, all pains give trouble to psychologists, as appears from their differences of opinion as to whether pain is feeling or sensation. I incline to regard it as sensation and as capable of being directly attended to. But whether feeling and conation would become phenomena if they were direct objects of attention, I do not know. The case reminds me of Poincaré's frequent assurances of what experience would be like if the world were entirely different from what it is. I have no courage for such excursions. But I may observe that, if we try to bring forward a conation so as to study it, it ceases to be the present conation;

for that is now the effort to bring it forward; and this effort is marginal.

All change of experience is activity of consciousness, because there is no such thing as passivity, just as there is physically no such thing as rest. But the couple—active, passive—is not thereby made useless: it has a relative application. I have shown this; and have concluded that consciousness of activity is that portion of the activity of consciousness which is determined by interest in an end. That is what we mean by *our* activity. Interest in an end often excites great efforts (for example) to think; yet the resulting activity, measured by changes in the ideational and sensuous content, may be small. I congratulate every Aristotelian who has not had this experience when trying to think of something to say.

Probably the intensity of conation is proportionate to the muscle sensations involved. In finishing a house of cards these sensations (I say "muscle" for brevity) are such as the fixing of the eyes, holding the breath, scalp-strain, circulation, etc.; and there is not very much else; for the limbs employed are small and their contractions slight. In a football scrimmage all these sensations are present, but they are completely masked by massive sensations from the whole of the trunk and limbs. That is to say, to the common footballer they are masked, but they cannot entirely escape the eye of the psychologist.

Harrison and Sons, Printers in Ordinary to His Majesty, St. Martin's Lane.